

THE THANE SLUG

A REBUTTAL

BY

ALAN WEINBERG

(illustrated actual size)



I read the editor's article on Dick Reisinger's "Thane Slug" in the August/September issue of Alaskan Token Collector & Polar Numismatist. While it is well documented and reasoned, I must strenuously disagree with his conclusions.

I have not owned nor commercially handled it so I do not have a "position" to protect. I have however handled and examined it and have "lusted" after it. I have no doubt it is old and legitimate and worth several thousand dollars. It is not a fantasy or concoction made up in modern times to fool or deceive collectors.

The medal was very likely made or conceived by an official at Alaska-Gastineau for presentation to either stockholders, partners, investors or a close family member. Perhaps to be worn as a watch fob attachment or simply as a pocket piece. There are dozens of similar souvenir ingots or "trinkets" made from the first metal mined issued by 19th and early 20th century mining companies - many highly prized from the so-called Pioneer gold firms. So there is certainly a long established history of these items.

The word "Gold" in the Thane Slug's legend, instead of "Gastineau," is simply an aesthetic way of fitting the Slug's inscribed legend onto a planchet and making the legend look "balanced" without overcrowding the planchet. Look at the picture of the Slug's obverse. Remove the word "Gold" and insert "Gastineau" and you have an inscription that runs completely around the periphery without any space. This makes the obverse too "busy" and aesthetically unbalanced and ugly. The company official and certainly the engraver would have realized this in designing the piece.

Engraving the Thane Slug with appropriately smaller letters to accommodate "Gastineau" instead of "Gold" would have made it difficult to read. Why not a larger planchet? Because this size "round" was appropriate for the fob, pocket piece or pendant.

The shortening of a legend is not without precedent in U.S. numismatics. The U.S. Mint and the United States Congress initially approved the first Chain Cent reverse inscription to read "United States of Ameri." due to a perceived shortness of space.

As to the 14Kt nature of the Thane Slug, this initially bothered me too. But it is easily understood. The slug was intended as a souvenir pocket piece or watch fob attachment (or if intended for a lady, a necklace pen-

EDITORIAL

This month we bring you a differing view point on the Thane Slug. While I don't have a problem with most of Alan's points, he does not explain the use of the word "Gold" to my satisfaction.

I have a hard time accepting that a company official would allow this just for the sake of aesthetics. This was a proud day. Would Mr. Smythe allow the name on his son's birth certificate to be shortened to Smith? I think not.

I agree with Alan in that I think it is legitimate. It feels right. I think the incorrect name is due to the medal being engraved by someone not fully aware of the correct name of the company. But there are aspects of this piece that are troubling.

This month is a real "stretch" for your editor. I am going to attempt to compose the entire newsletter on Adobe PageMaker 6.5. After fighting with Word Perfect (which I generally find very friendly) to place photos of tokens in the text of the auction, it is apparent to me that if I am going to scan and place photos rather than physically cut and paste, I am going to have to make this change.

Speaking of the auction, the Alaska portion of the sale is included with this issue.

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CROCODILE TEARS



Ebay offers an amazing variety of items for sale. It seems like it is only a matter of time for any given item to come up to auction. Some amazing things have appeared in the past, and continue to appear.

During my religious pilgrimage (baseball) to Phoenix last November, I picked up a set of tokens from the Mambo Club. Visions of exotic locales, tropical islands and topless Polynesians danced in my head (as well as on the tokens). Outrigger canoes, sail boats, pineapples, fish, drums and star fish grace the tokens. Guam, American Samoa, Wake, Midway, Palmyra Atoll all came to mind. No amount of research would reveal where these tokens were from.

Then, in July, my visions of tropical bliss were shattered. A Mambo Club token appeared on eBay attributed to.....Wichita, Kansas. I was in such denial that I emailed the seller to see how positive his attribution was. Well, it seems he knew an old timer that worked there.

Meaning no disrespect to Wichita, this is just not my idea of a tropical paradise. If I had to pick a spot this token would not be from, this would be in my top ten list (if I even thought of it).

So, I am the proud owner of what has to be the most exotic set of tokens from Kansas. Token collecting is an adventure. If you get over the value/money aspect, and look at the intangibles, it is truly amazing how much fun one can have!

THANE SLUG, CONT.

dant). the company official conceiving the piece or the jeweler making it undoubtedly realized that any unalloyed, highly pure gold souvenir would rapidly wear and lose its inscriptions, particularly the engraved reverse mine pictorial with its very fine and shallowly engraved details. So, why not alloy it sufficiently like most other jewelry (14Kt) so it withstands wear and abuse?

Finally, experience and instinct in this hobby of ours is important. Time and time again, over the many decades I have collected, experienced numismatists and exnumists say the first, and sometimes most important indication that a piece is "bad" is the item's first "gut" impression that it makes on the examiner. My instinct is the piece is perfectly old and legitimate. Yes, the engraving could be deeper and more refined and the "rose gold" (14Kt) appearance is not what one would hope for in a gold mine "first run" souvenir. But in my opinion, the piece is legitimate, old, very rare, and valuable.

Ron Benices writes: "Alaska Gold Mines Co. does not appear in any of the Bradstreets of Duns for Alaska."

Bob Lyall writes: "One idea for the Thane Slug! If you had it tested for metal content by spectrographic analysis, using a scanning electron microscope, this shows the trace elements in the sample. It would show every element in the medallion and give a percentage as well. You could then compare that to a test piece of "raw" gold from the site, and see if they compared well. That would not prove it was from Thane although it would be very supportive. But if the traces were different, then it probably would prove it was not. There may be one problem with the test. You might get a biased reading because it works by bombarding a small surface area and determining its metal contents and percentages. This then may mean that if the subject item has been handled, then the acids from hands might leach out some chemicals and thus give a different percentage reading to what is in the metal in the centre of the subject item."

Editor: There was just an article in World Coin News about this process. Only problem is that we still don't know the properties of the "concentrate" that the mill produced. I like Bob's idea, though. It would be neat to get a scan done.

GREENLAND CHALLENGE COINS



A friend works at Gilmore Tracking Station, about 20 miles north of Fairbanks. He was sent to Thule, Greenland on temporary assignment this past summer. Before he left, we told him to be on the look-out for anything numismatic. The above "Challenge Coins" are the result of his sojourn on the Greenland ice cap.

The medal at the top appears to be struck in a copper-nickel alloy. It is for the 12th Space Warning Squadron. It depicts the top of the world, with a satellite in orbit, and what we presume to be a missile. A fox sits at the pole. The reverse has a map of Greenland showing Thule's location, and the legend "We like it on top" and in Latin, "Cacume Nobis Placet," loosely translated, "the top of the world belongs to us."

The next medal was struck in bronze and pewter. It shows a polar bear coming out of a radar dome and the legend "Thule Tracking Station, 76.516 N, 68.6W." The reverse has "DET 3, 22 SOPS, Thule, Greenland" with a globe with only a map of Greenland, being circled by satellites, and a radar dish and "POGO." A very small image of a polar bear and explorer with flag is at the pole.

We have only two sets of these three medals available. Price for the set is \$45 postpaid. You may want to call to reserve a set.